

## THE CALL OF THE DISCIPLES (16-20)

*And passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting their nets into the sea (for they were fishermen). And Jesus said to them, "Follow after me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they abandoned their nets and followed him. And going a little farther, he saw James, the son of Zebedee and John, his brother, and they were in the ship mending the nets. And immediately he called to them and they abandoned their father, Zebedee, in the ship with the hired hand, going after him.*

It was uncommon for Jewish teachers to call disciples; the follower usually chose a teacher and followed.

One OT example is that of Elijah and Elisha:<sup>1</sup>

<i>1 Kings 19.19-20</i>	<i>Mark 1.16-18</i>
Elijah found Elisha and passed by	Passing by...Jesus caught sight of Simon and Andrew; cf. 1.19: he caught sight of James and John
Elijah cast his cloak over Elisha [signifying that Elisha should accompany him and become his successor]	Jesus: "Come on after me" (δουετε οπισω μου); cf. 1.20: he called them
Elisha: "I will follow after you" (ακολουθησω οπισω σου); he went after Elijah (επορευθη οπισω Ηλιου)	They followed him (ηκολουθησαν αυτω); cf. 1.20: they went after him (απηλθεν οπισω αυτου)

"The point of this parallel is not that Jesus is Elijah; that role is assumed in Mark's Gospel by John the Baptist (see 1.2-8; 9.11-13). But the general theme of prophetic authority is important to Mark, as is the notion that Jesus shares this authority with his followers and successors (cf. 3.14-15; 6.17; 13.34)."<sup>2</sup>

There is an interesting contrast between Jesus and Mattathias, a Jewish zealot in line with Phinehas,<sup>3</sup> catalyst for the Maccabean revolt; see 1 Macc 2.27-28:

<sup>1</sup> Table from Joel Marcus. *Mark 1-8: The Anchor Bible* (Doubleday), 2005, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Num 25.6-13; cf. 1 Macc 2.26

Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: “Let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!” And he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the city.

While Mattathias called people<sup>4</sup> to follow him to holy war, Jesus is calling disciples to a cosmic war through his own death and resurrection, and consequently, the martyrdom of his disciples.<sup>5</sup>

Both the disciples of Mattathias and the disciples of Jesus abandoned everything they had because of their L/lord’s cause.

This view of a revolutionary-political-war type of Messiah was held well into the times of the Apostles.<sup>6</sup>

The phrase ‘fishers of men’ may have OT roots as well – Jer 16.16; Ezek 29.4-6; Amos 4.2; Hab 1.14-17

- In the DSS the members of the elect community are warned about the 3 nets of Satan, which could give to the meaning of fishing men out of the grips of the Adversary in the theme of cosmic battle in Mark
- All OT passages are in the context of judgment against God’s enemies.
  - Hab 1.14-17
    - Habakkuk brings his complaint to Yahweh that he has allowed the Chaldeans to destroy nations.
    - The means of the Chaldean victories is a fishing net and hook.
    - The Chaldeans bring the victims in by fishing for men.
    - Yahweh is the one who has made mankind like fish.
  - Amos 4.2
    - The women of Samaria will be judged by being dragged out with fishhooks.
    - This is due to their neglect of the poor.
  - Ezek 29.4-6
    - Pharaoh considers himself to be the omnipotent crocodile of the Nile
    - Pharaoh claims to be the creator of the Nile
    - Yahweh will drag him away, along with his armies, into the wilderness to be eaten by other animals and birds; cf. 30.6-8.
    - This is so that Egypt will know Yahweh
  - Jer 16.16
    - Yahweh will rescue the faithful remnant in Israel while judging the “fathers” who have served other gods.

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, his own family; cf. Jesus calls his disciples his family in Matt 12.50.

<sup>5</sup> Many of the Maccabees were considered martyrs as well.

<sup>6</sup> This is what is behind followers of Jesus misunderstanding the cross and resurrection; see Luke 24.13-34; Acts 1.6-7.

- Yahweh is sending hunters and fishermen to catch and hunt every sinner
- This is to magnify the name of Yahweh

The “fishing for men” is also a reference to what Jesus is doing in calling the disciples and have an evangelistic appeal.

Rather than choosing between the OT allusions and the evangelistic ministry of Jesus, it should be seen as a mixture of both.

With all of the above, it seems that we could say that Jesus was calling them to be those who would be Yahweh’s fishers to proclaim eschatological salvation to his people and eschatological judgment to his enemies in a new exodus.<sup>7</sup>

The immediate obedience of the first four disciples shows the in breaking of the Kingdom of God and Jesus’ sovereign call to men to follow him.

This should be considered as a miracle alongside the exorcisms and supernatural acts.

“All human reticence has been instantaneously washed away because *God* has arrived on the scene in the person of Jesus, and it is *his* compelling voice that speaks through Jesus’ summons.”<sup>8</sup>

John and James have a boat, whereas Simon and Andrew do not.

They were mending their nets, probably preparing them to go fishing again.

Typically, we think of the fishermen as poor. This passage shows us that some fishermen were at least middle class.

The Sea of Galilee was full of fish and was a center for fishing in the region. It was possible to make quite a living from fishing.

The Zebedee family had a boat and a hired worker. This probably makes them more middle class than impoverished.

The men left their careers, possessions, and families in order to follow Jesus.

From the beginning of Jesus’ ministry he is involved in community – an ancient small group.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> So Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 2001, p 85-86.

<sup>8</sup> Marcus, 185.

The radical abandonment that leads to discipleship is a model worth imitating.

Family and possessions are secondary to following Christ.

### **THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS (21-28)**

*And they entered into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he was going into the synagogue and was teaching. And they were amazed upon his teaching, for he was teaching like one who had authority and not like the scribes.*

*And immediately there was in the synagogue a man in an unclean spirit and he cried out, saying, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth; have you come to destroy us? We know who you are, O Holy One of God." And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent and come out from him." And the unclean spirit was convulsing him and crying out with a great cry, he came out from him. And they all were astounded and discussed among themselves, saying, "What is this new teaching with authority? And the unclean spirits obey his command!" And immediately the report of him went out everywhere into the entire surrounding area of Galilee.*

Capernaum was probably the first "Jesus headquarters" in his ministry.

That Jesus is working on the Sabbath in vv.21-34. This is controversial (though no one gets upset in this account) and will later cause conflict with Jewish leaders.<sup>10</sup>

Early synagogues were not like modern churches. There was no formally trained leadership such as pastors, elders, deacons, etc.

Speakers were usually those with some knowledge of the Scriptures, probably scribes, who would perform Scripture readings and sermons, probably after prayer. Speakers were by invite only. There is no indication that Jesus was invited, but may have been.

On scribes, Larry Hurtado says the following:

These men were a recognized body in Jesus' time, having emerged sometime during or after the Babylonian exile (6th century BC). They included perhaps priests and many others not from priestly descent, and their main activity was the study, discussion, and teaching of the religious law of ancient Judaism based on the OT law attributed to Moses. Their expertise gave them great respect among the people, and they appear to be an early stage of the modern office of

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<sup>9</sup> "The social situation is one of the recruitment of disciples for new tasks, not, or at least not primarily, the conversion of the lost, but one may also add that by so recruiting and training them Jesus is de facto establishing a new social entity, a new community" (Witherington, 84).

<sup>10</sup> Mark 2.23-27.

Rabbi in Judaism. Their discussions of the requirements of the Jewish law were often quite complex and involved detailed arguments about the meaning of OT passages. In their zeal to make the Jewish law applicable to all areas of life, they produced a large body of oral law, collections of precedents and judgments by revered teachers, which came to be regarded as of equal weight to the written commandments of the OT.<sup>11</sup>

“Likewise, there is but one positive reference to a scribe in Mark (see 12.28-34); the remaining eighteen preferences portray scribes as antagonists of Jesus and his mission.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, it is important to note that Jesus’ teaching was seen as more authoritative than the scribes.<sup>13</sup> Jesus was not a scribe, but a prophet who does not get his information from scholarly debate, but from God himself.<sup>14</sup>

First mention here of ἐξουσία, authority, mentioned here and in v. 27, both bookending the pericope.<sup>15</sup>

Beginning here, the synagogues are portrayed as a place characterized by demonic presence, conflict with Jewish leaders over Jesus’ work (3.1-6), rejection from unbelievers (6.2-6), and violence against Christians (13.9).

The man with an unclean spirit should not be allowed into the synagogue, especially on Sabbath, because he was ritually unclean.

The man’s identity is muddled with the identity of the unclean spirit to the point that the “he” that speaks is both the man and the unclean spirit. Demonic possession overthrows the will of the man, but it is the unclean spirit responsible for the actions and words.

The question, “What have you to do with us?” reveals that the demonic spirits feel threatened at the presence of “the Holy One of God.” This may be because the demon saw the synagogue as his territory, which follows along with the unfavorable view of the synagogue.

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<sup>11</sup> Larry Hurtado. *Mark: New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson) 1989, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Edwards, 54.

<sup>13</sup> Ezra was the first scribe. See Ezra 7.6, 11.

<sup>14</sup> “The scribes derive their authority from the ‘tradition of the elders’ (7.8-13) – the fathers of Judaism, we might say; whereas Jesus receives his authority directly from the Father in heaven (1.11). The authority of the scribes is contingent on the authority of the Torah and hence a mediated authority; whereas Jesus appeals to an immediate and superior authority resident in himself that he received at his baptism” (James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 55).

<sup>15</sup> ἐξουσία occurs 9 times with 6 referencing Jesus and 3 referencing Jesus’ delegated authority given to the apostles.

The naming/identification of Jesus – “What have you do with us, *Jesus of Nazareth?*” – is seen by some scholars as an attempt by the spirit to gain control. This speculation at best. This interpretation is difficult because of the next question posed by the spirit: “Have you come to destroy us?” This reveals the utter fear of the unclean spirit on behalf of himself and his fellow demonic spirits.<sup>16</sup> Jesus is not a normal exorcist who uses catch phrases and manipulation over spirits. He is the full expression of the Kingdom of God.

“The Holy One of God” has roots in the OT and other pre-Christian Jewish material. The most notable is Samson,<sup>17</sup> who is called “Holy One of God” (Jdgs 16.17 LXX).<sup>18</sup> Jesus is the stronger man who binds Satan and his demonic henchmen (1.7; 3.27).

The identification of Jesus as the Holy One of God begins the “demonic identification” theme in Mark (e.g. 5.7).

The “rebuke” Jesus gives to the demon is seen by some scholars to be a traditional Jewish term used in exorcisms. Although, there may be some traditional way to exorcise demons, I think this misses the point. Mark’s emphasis is on Jesus’ authority over the demons. A short rebuke is all that is necessary.

The command to be silent could fall in line with the Messianic secret theme. As noted earlier, demons know the identity of Jesus, so Jesus tells this one to be silent so that his identity is not known before it is time.

The demon comes out with a loud cry (cf. 5.7) and throwing the man into convulsions (cf. 9.20, 26).

The response of the people is the natural response: they were amazed or astonished. It is also natural that the crowds in the synagogue are questioning who Jesus is. They have never seen an authoritative figure like this who teaches more like a prophet than a scribe and who exorcises demons like no one they have seen.<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting that we never are told what the content of Jesus’ teaching is in the synagogue. “The focus is on Jesus as the authoritative teacher, not on his subject matter. In short, the focus is Christological, not pedagogical.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Perhaps the evil spirit knows that Jesus’ mission is not simply to defeat one demon, but to lay waste the entire demonic power structure” (Edwards, 57).

<sup>17</sup> Samson (Jdgs 13-16) was one that was filled with the Holy Spirit to war against the Philistines. Jesus was one that was filled with the Holy Spirit to war against Satan.

<sup>18</sup> “Ὅτι ἅγιος θεοῦ ἐγὼ εἰμι ἀπο κοιλίας μητρὸς μου”; lit. “That I am a holy one of God from the womb of my mother.”

<sup>19</sup> It seems that Mark stresses the fact that these demon-possessed persons will never receive freedom outside of Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> Witherington, 93.

The response to the dual-authoritative ministry of Jesus is that there is a rapid movement of his fame: *immediately* his fame spread *everywhere* throughout *all* the surround region of Galilee. This rapid spreading of fame should not come as a surprise. Mark quoted Malachi 3.1 in v. 2, which says that the Lord will *suddenly* enter his temple. The expected eschatological deliverance is sudden... εὐθὺς.

The meaning of exorcisms is not to show Jesus' magical powers and manipulative incantations; it is eschatological. "[Jesus] comes...as the sign and agent of God's eschatological reign, in which there will be no room for demonic opposition to God."<sup>21</sup> In Zech 13.2, Yahweh promises to remove unclean spirits from the land of the prophets.<sup>22</sup>

### **Healing Simon's Mother-in-Law and Everyone Else (29-34)**

#### *Simon's mother-in-law* (29-31)

*And immediately they came from the synagogue and went into the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. And Simon's mother-in-law was lying down, sick with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And coming to her, he raised her, holding her hand. And the fever left her and she ministered to them.*

There is archaeological evidence that what seems to be the apostle Peter's house (οικία) was probably a short walk from the synagogue. There are several markings on the walls that may indicate that his house held an early Christian assembly around the end of the first century.<sup>23</sup>

Simon's mother-in-law had a "fever" (ESV, TNIV, NASB, KJV, NKJV; NLT – "high fever"). This is the Greek word πυρετός which is a general word for illness or sickness. In some cases a πυρετός was fatal (John 4.46-54).

The four disciples tell Jesus about Simon's mother-in-law; it is reasonable to believe that upon seeing the events in the synagogue (and possibly other events they witnessed) they thought Jesus could heal her as well. This seems to be the motivation for so many people coming out to him; it is interesting that it is not Jesus going to them, but them going to Jesus.

It is still the Sabbath. After the calling of the disciples, Jesus' first two miracles are on the Sabbath dealing with demonic oppression (21-28) and healing of a sick woman.

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<sup>21</sup> Marcus, 192.

<sup>22</sup> "And on that day, declares Yahweh, the Lord of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols of the land, so that they shall be remembered no more. And also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness."

<sup>23</sup> Edwards, 59.

## *The Importance of the Sabbath*

"The Sabbath had become a symbol of the eschatological rest or shalom that God would one day provide for his people when, as the Pharisees thought, Messiah came and brought in the age to come. The longed-for Sabbath was the coming of the dominion of God. Thus Jesus' beginning of his healing work on the Sabbath should be seen as a deliberate attempt to bring in that final Sabbath rest, a time when creation would be relieved not just of the toil and turmoil of a fallen world but of disease, decay, and death as well. From this perspective, there was no better time to heal a person than on the Sabbath as an indicator that the ultimate Sabbath was coming."<sup>24</sup>

Those who are critical of Jesus' work on the Sabbath (3.1-6) misunderstand what the Sabbath is about – rest from the ailments of this sinful world.

Touching an unrelated woman was a social offense; touching an unclean woman on the Sabbath combines social and religious offenses.

Peter was married (see 1 Cor 9.5); this identifies another aspect of his cost of discipleship. It is doubtful that Peter abandoned her; rather, he probably left her for a period of time and came back.

<i>Typical Pattern of Healing Stories</i> <sup>25</sup>	<i>Pattern of v. 31</i>
1. The touch of the healer	1. He came up and took her by the hand and lifted her up
2. The sudden cure	2. and the fever left her
3. The action by the cured person demonstrating he is well once more.	3. and she began to serve them.

"and he came up and took her by the hand" may have an allusion to Isaiah 42, which has already been influential in Mark (1.11). Is 42.6 – "I will take you by the hand and strengthen you." This may be a stretch, but could have some meaning in light of the already obvious Isaianic context of Mark.

This is the first section dealing with healing; Messiah was thought to bring eschatological healing and resurrection:

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<sup>24</sup> Witherington, 100.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 99. An alternative is quoted in Marcus, 199: "Description of illness: 'She had a fever.' Request for healing: 'They told him about her.' Healing touch: 'Coming forward, he grasped her hand and raised her up.' Accomplishment of cure: 'The fever left her.' Demonstration of cure: 'She began serving them.'"



[the hea]vens and the earth will listen to His Messiah, and none therein will stray from the commandments of the holy ones. Seekers of the Lord, strengthen yourselves in His service! All you hopeful in (your) heart, will you not find the Lord in this? For the Lord will consider the pious and call the righteous by name. Over the poor His spirit will hover and will renew the faithful with His power. And He will glorify the pious on the throne of the eternal Kingdom. He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the b[ent] And f[or] ever I will cleav[e to the h]opeful and in His mercy . . . And the fr[uit . . .] will not be delayed for anyone. And the Lord will accomplish glorious things which have never been as [He . . .] **For He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor.** . . . He will lead the uprooted and knowledge . . . and smoke.<sup>26</sup>

In this DSS text we see a quote from Isaiah 61.1 “bring good news to the poor.” Earlier we saw that this text spoke of Messiah and in Luke 4, Jesus says this is speaking of himself and his ministry. It is important for our discussion that healing is brought about because of the in-breaking of the dominion/Kingdom of God. The KoG is manifest in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus is the Messiah-Healer who will ultimately heal all of the wounded, revive all of his saints,<sup>27</sup> and bring good news to all the poor. This could give intertextual meaning to vv. 32-34 and Mark’s use of “all” and “whole.”

διακονεω – could mean any type of service, but because of the domestic context we could assume that she served a meal.

The proper response to deliverance is service; the proper response to salvation is discipleship.

“Serving is the way of Jesus and of those who attend him, and thus it describes an essential characteristic of the kingdom of God that Jesus introduces and exemplifies. For Mark, the proper response of one who has been touched by Jesus is to serve ‘them,’ that is, the Christian fellowship.”<sup>28</sup>

This is the second time service is mentioned in Mark: 1) Angels minister to Jesus and 2) Simon’s mother-in-law ministers to Jesus and his disciples. Marcus points out that this shows that Mark sees angels, Jesus, and his disciples on one side all serving against demons, Satan, and other humans, especially religious authorities.<sup>29</sup>

### Healings and Exorcisms All Around! (29-31)

<sup>26</sup> DSS: 4Q521

<sup>27</sup> It is notable that Isaiah 61 says nothing about a Messiah figure that raises the dead. In fact, nothing in the Hebrew Bible says so.

<sup>28</sup> Edwards, 60.

<sup>29</sup> Marcus, 199-200.

*And it was becoming evening, when the sun goes down, they were bringing to him all who had sickness and all who were oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons; and he did not allow the demons to speak for they knew him.*

“That evening at sundown” marks the end of the Sabbath. Again it is important to note that vv. 21-34 occur on the Sabbath day.

At the end of the Sabbath (or Shabbat, שבת) at sundown, the Jewish people would perform the Havdalah ritual. This ritual was a benediction to Sabbath. “Havdalah” means separation and praises God for his separating work.

In Judaism, the concept of making distinctions and separations permeates many facets of religious life. We distinguish between holy time and mundane, or ordinary, time. We declare certain books to be holy and distinguish them in the way we study and treat them, from books which are mundane. We treat holy spaces with particular reverence. The Torah teaches that God created the world by making distinctions, first between light and darkness, next between water and empty space, finally between earth and water. We, too, make distinctions in our lives, and primary among them is the distinction between sacred time and ordinary time. To mark the beginning of sacred time, we light two candles and recite a *berakhah* (blessing) which praises God who commanded us to kindle the lights in celebration of the occasion. We mark the end of that sacred time period with a ceremony called *Havdalah*, which means "separation." It, too, begins with light, as we kindle a braided candle. The most common time to perform the ceremony of *Havdalah* is weekly at the end of Shabbat when three stars appear in the sky. *Havdalah* is also performed at the end of other festivals and holy days.

The primary symbols of *Havdalah* are the braided candle, *kiddush* cup containing wine, and spice box containing sweet-smelling spices. The lighted candle symbolizes the light of Shabbat and the strands of the braid have been interpreted as the many types of Jews in the world, all of whom are part of one unified people. The wine is, as always, a symbol of joy. We take one last sip of the joy of Shabbat as we bid the sabbath goodbye for another week. Similarly, the sweet-smelling spices symbolize the sweetness of Shabbat, whose pleasant aroma we breathe in one last time that it might last us through the week to come until we can welcome Shabbat again. There is also a *birchat havdalah* which praises God for making distinctions, particularly the distinction between the holy and the mundane. The ceremony ends with singing *Eliyahu*

*HaNavi* in the hopes that Elijah the Prophet will come to herald the messianic age when the world will become one long Shabbat.<sup>30</sup>

Again, see the importance of Elijah at this ceremony:

Even more central is his role as messianic herald. At the End of Days, Elijah at the Messiah's command, will blow the *shofar*, revealing the Primal Light of Creation, reviving the dead, and rebuilding the Temple. His arrival will banish all evil from the earth. At the Passover Seder, a full cup of wine (Elijah's Cup) is set out on the table, but not drunk, in expectation of the prophet's arrival to announce the dawn of the messianic Age. At the *Havdalah* ceremony, Elijah's name is involved in the hopes that he will come to usher in the final eternal Shabbat of the Messianic Age.<sup>31</sup>

This last note about Elijah is important to our discussion about Mark. As we saw earlier in the Prologue to Mark (1.1-15), John the Baptist is the one who has come like Elijah in Malachi 4.5. He has come, bring repentance and cleansing to "all Israel"; after Elijah comes the Messiah who brings everlasting Shabbat. This eternal rest is the end to Israel's wandering in the exilic wilderness; it is the goal of the New Exodus.

It is during the time of *havdalah* that crowds bring their sick and oppressed to Jesus. Elijah has come and the Messiah is here, recreating God's world by bringing the authority of the KoG into the world.

A few more remarks on the Sabbath: most of the people brought to Jesus for healing/exorcism were devout Jews; they have waited until after Sabbath so as to not break the law. This shows that a devout commitment to Jewish practice and connection with Jesus (whether discipleship or by acquaintance) can coexist.<sup>32</sup>

At this point Jesus' fame has manifested itself in a crowd that is pressing at the door of Simon's home. It is notable that Mark says "all of the sick and oppressed" were brought to him and that "the whole city" was gathered at the door. Again we can mention 4Q521 which mentions that Messiah will heal wounds and revive the dead. The fact that "all" are coming is testimony not just to Jesus' popularity, but primarily to his role as Savior of all Israel.

The disciples were bringing (εφερον) people to him. This verb, as R. T. France concludes, "suggests a continuous stream of people."<sup>33</sup> The picture is of a line waiting to see Jesus as he heals illness and exorcises demons. The excitement of a local healer is growing fast as many have heard and have now traveled to see Jesus.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/havdalah.html>; accessed 11/22/2008.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.jhom.com/topics/havdalah/elijah.html>; accessed 11/22/2008.

<sup>32</sup> Marcus, 200.

<sup>33</sup> France, 109.

“It is perhaps worth noting that here, and throughout the gospel, we have no indication that Jesus himself went out looking for patients. The language is always of their either being brought to him or taking the initiative in approaching him themselves. He was not engaged in a ‘healing campaign’; healing and exorcism, important as they were in his total ministry, arose not so much by design as from a natural response to need as he encountered it, boosted by people’s desire to benefit from his unique εξουσία”<sup>34</sup> (authority, power).

Mark says that Jesus healed “many” (πολλοι), not “all” (παντα, v. 32) of those who came to him. Some may take from this that Jesus chose only to save some of those who came to him. There seems to be no reason for such a negative reading of the text, but in context seems to show that Jesus healed many of them.

The terms “various” and “many” to describe the sickness and demons suggests Jesus’ total sovereign power over all kinds of illness and demonic activity; he can cast out any demon (in fact, he can cast out many from one person [5.1-20]) and heal any sickness, e.g. fever (1.30-31), leprosy (1.40-45), paralysis (2.1-12).

The sharp distinction between sickness and demonic oppression is important for Mark (1.32, 34). He is highlighting Jesus’ power over demons, which will be reemphasized in that Jesus is the stronger man who binds Satan (3.27).

Jesus is said to not permit the demons to speak. Again the messianic secret theme appears. Why would Jesus tell them to be silent? Wouldn’t Jesus want everyone to know who he was?

Mark employs the theme for his own Christological purpose, namely, that until the consummation of Jesus’ work on the cross all the speculations about him are premature. Only at the cross can Jesus rightly be known for who he is. Until the confession of the centurion at the cross (15.39), all utterances about Jesus – and especially those coming from members of the rebellion – are either premature or false.<sup>35</sup>

### **MAKING TIME FOR PRAYER (35-39)**

*And rising very early in the morning, when it was still dark, he went out and departed to a desolate place to pray [in that place]. And Simon and those with him hunted him down and they found him and they said to him, “Everyone is seeking you.” And he said to them, “Let us carry on elsewhere, to the surrounding villages, so that I may preach in*

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, 63.

*that place, for this is why I came out. And he went preaching in their synagogues in all of Galilee and casting out demons.*

Mark has portrayed Jesus as an incredibly busy man. His use of *ευθως* (immediately, at once) has made for a fast-paced account of Jesus' life and ministry. Since the prologue (1.1-15), we have seen Jesus call four disciples, teach with authority, perform an exorcism in the synagogue, heal Simon's mother-in-law, heal many other sick people, and exorcise many other oppressed people. Most of this (21-34) was done in one day! So what does Jesus do next? Jesus woke up early and prayed.

"While it was still dark" means 3:00AM to 6:00AM.

The locale of his prayer is important. Most translations read that Jesus went to a deserted place (HCSB), an isolated place (NLT), a solitary place (NKJV, TNIV) or a desolate place (ESV). In Greek this is the same word used in chapter one for wilderness (*ερημον*). James Edwards picks up on this:

[this] is the same place where John preached (1.4) and where Jesus was tempted (1.12). As we noted earlier, in Mark the word does not connote a desert waste but, reflecting Israel's sojourn in the wilderness following the Exodus, a place of repentance, restoration, and fellowship with God.<sup>36</sup>

JESUS' PRAYER LIFE	
Occasion	Opposition
After healing and exorcising demons (1.35)	Upcoming opposition from religious authorities (2.1-3.6)
After feed the 5,000 (6.46)	Upcoming conflict with Pharisees over man-made traditions (7.1-23)
After Passover/Lord's Supper (14.12-25)	Upcoming arrest, judgment, and death (14.43-16.8)

Jesus' prayer was to seek the will of the Father. This is Jesus' *modus operandi*.<sup>37</sup>

Simon and his comrades "searched for him" (ESV). The Greek verb *καταδιωκω* is much stronger than this; literally it means "follow hard after," "pursue closely," or even "hunt down."<sup>38</sup>

When the disciples found him they told Jesus that it wasn't just them looking for him, but "everyone." This was probably the result of Jesus' vast healing ministry in

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>37</sup> This is not explicitly stated in Mark, but can be inferred from his actions and also from parallels in the other synoptics – Matt 26.39; Luke 22.42 – which explicitly say Jesus' wish is to do God's will. Also see Mark 11.27-33.

<sup>38</sup> The NLT absolutely misses the point with "went out to find him"; Cf. TNIV.

Capernaum. All common sense tells us that Jesus would stay there to minister to “everyone,” but he has another plan. “Everyone” is looking for him for the wrong reasons. Jesus is not a novelty, but is the Messiah, son of God. As Edwards points out,

‘Seeking’ connotes an attempt to determine and control rather than to submit and follow. In this respect, seeking for Jesus is not a virtue in the Gospel of Mark. Nor are clamoring crowds a sign of success or aid to ministry. Here, as elsewhere in Mark, enthusiasm is not to be confused with faith; indeed, it can oppose faith.<sup>39</sup>

V. 38 tells us the result from Jesus’ prayer time. God wants Jesus to focus on preaching. “Let us go...” emphasizes the nature of discipleship. Disciples of Jesus submit to his command and his vision and direction.

“For that is why I came out” resembles Amos’ call to prophesy:

I was no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. But the Lord took me from following the flock and the Lord said to me, “Go prophesy to my people Israel” (7.14-15).

Both Amos and Jesus, the great and better prophet, were commissioned by God to prophesy to Israel. Now Jesus is focused on the advancement of his message and cosmic mission (the KoG).

Jesus says that preaching is “why I came out.” Marcus points out that this word, ἐξέρχομαι, is used in secular terms as going out to battle. Thus, Jesus is going out to battle against demonic forces during his preaching ministry.<sup>40</sup> This word could also point out the pre-existent nature of Christ.<sup>41</sup>

Jesus’ return to preaching is also a reminder that Jesus is the fulfillment of Is 61.1 which proclaims that he has been anointed (at his baptism) to preach the gospel. He preaches this gospel in the synagogues, demonstrating “his mission is defined and directed by the completion of God’s purposes for Israel.”<sup>42</sup>

The result is Jesus and his disciples preaching in the Galilean synagogues and casting out demons. Jesus’ plan was to merely go to the surrounding towns, but the result was that “all Galilee” was preached to by Jesus. Jesus’ ministry is again summed up by Mark to be preaching and exorcising.

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<sup>39</sup> Edwards, 67.

<sup>40</sup> Marcus, 204.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid; France, 113.

<sup>42</sup> Edwards, 68.

Jesus' command to the disciples to come with him is a summons to all of Christ's disciples. This call is to join the mission God has for the world through the advancement of the KoG through the proclamation that God is coming to save his people and he has done this in his son, Jesus.

### Cleansing a Leper (1.40-45)

*And a man with a skin disease came to him imploring him and falling to his knees and saying, "If you are willing you are able to cleanse me." And Jesus was enraged and stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I am willing. Be cleansed." And immediately the disease came out from him and he was cleansed. And Jesus growled at him and immediately cast him out. And he said to him, "See that you say nothing to no one, but go and show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, to bear witness to them. But he was going out and began proclaiming many things and spreading the message. For this reason, he was no longer able to publicly enter into a town but he was out in deserted places and they were coming to him from all corners.*

The account of the leper concludes the long section of 1.16-45.<sup>43</sup> Jesus has just come from Capernaum, his early headquarters, and entered into Galilee, preaching and casting out demons (39). While in Galilee, Jesus encounters a leper, or as is normally the case, the leper goes out to him. By this time Jesus is known around the Galilean region as a miracle worker and healer. This is the probable reason for the leper to come to Jesus.<sup>44</sup>

Leprosy in the NT should not be confused with modern-day leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease. The Greek word used in the LXX and NT is *λεπρος* or *λεπρα* and could be any kind of skin disease (e.g. psoriasis, lupus, etc.) and was even translated into nature (e.g. animal disease, tree disease, and mold). A better, modern translation of *λεπρος* is "a man with a skin disease."<sup>45</sup> Leprosy was extremely contagious and thought by most to be incurable.<sup>46</sup>

The OT background for leprosy and what Israelites were commanded to do concerning it is found in Leviticus 13-14. The social implications for a leper were devastating.

Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' As

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<sup>43</sup> Marcus (207) sees this passage as transitional between 1.16-45 and 2.1-3.6.

<sup>44</sup> This account follows a typical outline for a healing passage: 1) request (v. 40); 2) healing action/word (41); 3) cure (42); 4) demonstration of cure (43-45). See Marcus, 208.

<sup>45</sup> It is possible that this man did have Hansen's disease, but most scholars do not believe it was prevalent during Jesus' days.

<sup>46</sup> Some rabbis thought it to be as curable as raising someone from the dead; see Edwards, 69, n. 45.

long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp.<sup>47</sup>

The leper “was not allowed in the temple or at any social or religious gather. Furthermore, anyone who touched a person in such a condition became unclean also...To have such a condition was not just a health liability; it made one a prisoner, *cut off from all normal life*.”<sup>48</sup> “The disease made the man perpetually unclean and must have caused deep anguish, for it prevented normal relationships and fellowship with one’s neighbors and friends. This was doubly so because such a disease was often seen as a divine punishment for serious sins (see 2 Kgs 5.7). Thus cleansing is uppermost in the man’s mind for he would like to lead a normal life.”<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the victim of the disease was considered dead,<sup>50</sup> a walking corpse,<sup>51</sup> and as with dead bodies, contact with lepers was considered unclean.

This man came to Jesus “imploing him and falling to his knees.” This emphasizes his desperation to be cured of his disease and rejoin the rest of society. It is notable that this is an extremely bold gesture by the leper; instead of shouting “Unclean!” he implores a Galilean miracle worker to heal him, coming dangerously close in the process.

The imploration that the leper gives is to “cleanse him.” This is conditioned upon Jesus’ desire to do so. *θελῆς* is translated here “will,” but can connote to determine, wish, or desire. The leper does not doubt Jesus’ power, but realizes that Jesus will not heal him unless he sees fit to do so. This interpretation is confirmed by the leper’s use of *δυνασαι*, which comes from *δυναμις*, the Greek word for power. He recognizes that Jesus alone has the power to cure the incurable. He is the one with *ἐξουσια*, the authority, over all demonic powers and diseases. Jesus has the power to “cleanse” the man. *καθαριζω*<sup>52</sup> is the word used here; this is the word used in Leviticus for ritual cleansing.<sup>53</sup> If the man were made ritually clean from the incurable disease he would be allowed to resume his life as normal.

In v.41 we have Jesus feeling compassionate. Herein lies a text-critical problem: this verb – *σπλαγχνισθεις* – is not in some of our trusted manuscripts. The word used in those manuscripts is *οργισθεις*, which means, “to be enraged.” Many recent commentators have preferred this reading over the majority testimony of “compassion.” If we are to see Jesus as “enraged,” what is he so upset about? Morna

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<sup>47</sup> Lev 13.45-46

<sup>48</sup> Hurtado, 30. Emphasis mine.

<sup>49</sup> Witherington, 103.

<sup>50</sup> See Num 12.10-15.

<sup>51</sup> From a remark by Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, who said that lepers were “in effect, dead persons” (*Antiquities* 3.264).

<sup>52</sup> From which we get “catharsis” which is a purification of emotions or bowels.

<sup>53</sup> See Lev 13 and 14 (*καθαριζω* is used 28 times), which are relevant here.



Hooker, as well as Joel Marcus, sees demonic forces behind leprosy.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Jesus is annoyed at the continued oppression of his people by Satan. James Edwards sees Jdgs 10.16 as an OT parallel: “And God became indignant over the misery of Israel” (RSV); Jesus was “enraged” over the misery of the leper. His reason for this conclusion is because Jesus healed him. His reasoning seems to be that Jesus would not have healed him if he were annoyed by the request.<sup>55</sup> R. T. France has a similar interpretation. Jesus’ rage is not aimed toward the leper, but toward the presence of evil in the man.<sup>56</sup> Though it is rare, some scholars see that σπλαγχνισθεις is original.<sup>57</sup>

I am in partial agreement with Marcus and Hooker. The language used in this healing passage is similar to an exorcism passage. The disease “came out from him” (απηλθεν απ αυτου) and Jesus “cast him away” (εξεβαλεν αυτον).

“There are especially close parallels between our passage and the exorcism a few verses earlier in 1.21-28: Jesus encounters uncleanness and engages in an angry rebuke, the impurity ‘comes out’ of the man, and the result is the spreading of Jesus’ fame.”<sup>58</sup>

Another legitimate explanation that I am keen to is that Jesus is upset because the healing is interfering with his preaching ministry. This seems like a natural interpretation of the passage, granted it rests upon the agreeing interpretation of the previous section (35-39).

After Jesus became enraged/filled with compassion, he stretched out his hand and touched him. Touching an unclean person resulted in making oneself unclean (e.g. Lev 14.46-47; Num 10.11-16). Jesus’ willingness to touch the man reveals several things about the nature of his ministry. First, Jesus seems to have an unusual view of the Law. On one hand, he ignores the risk of uncleanness and on the other, he tells the leper after he is healed to visit the local priest for a declaration of cleanness. Second, Jesus sees helping the helpless as higher in value than obeying restrictive interpretations of the law. Third, Jesus’ touch reverses the effects of touching an unclean person; he is not contaminated, but the unclean man is “cleansed.” “Unlike an ordinary rabbi, Jesus is not polluted by the leper’s disease; rather the leper is cleansed and healed by Jesus’ contagious holiness.”<sup>59</sup>

Jesus adds to his touch the words, “I am willing; be clean!” With these words the disease immediately (ευθυς) came out of the man, echoing the words of 1.26: “and crying out

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<sup>54</sup> Marcus, 209; also see Witherington, 103.

<sup>55</sup> Edwards, 70.

<sup>56</sup> France, 117-118.

<sup>57</sup> Hurtado, 33-34.

<sup>58</sup> Marcus, 209.

<sup>59</sup> Edwards, 70.

with a great cry, he came out (ἐξηλθεν)<sup>60</sup> from him.” R. T. France points out what many of us miss upon a cursory reading of Mark:

This is a particularly impressive [‘and immediately’]; while the extent of the man’s disfigurement cannot be known, an immediate visible cure is extraordinary. The vivid anthropomorphism [‘the leprosy left from him’] suggests that the symptoms of the disease could be seen to vanish, leaving the man visibly [‘cleansed’]. Jesus’ healings are immediate, and even the disfigurement of leprosy is no exception.<sup>61</sup>

After the departure of the skin disease, Jesus is said to be ἐμβριμησάμενος (*embrimēsamenos*). This Greek verb connotes the violent anger of animals, e.g. the snorting of horses.<sup>62</sup> This fits into the translation above: “Jesus growled at him...”; it is usually translated something to the effect of “he strictly told him.” This is more than a harsh rebuke; it is an outward manifestation of anger. The anger at the evil demonic forces<sup>63</sup> is now turned toward the healed man. This flows in line with Jesus’ frustration with the man because of his desire to continue his preaching ministry.

This angry Jesus (cf. v. 41) “immediately cast him out.” The verb for casting out (ἐκβαλλω) is a technical term for exorcisms, and gives weight to the demonic interpretation of the passage.

The content of the angry growl or warning is stated in v. 44: “See that you say nothing to no one.” Jesus is again protecting his identity from those who do not hold the correct interpretation of his ministry. “The pragmatic reason for this secrecy is clearly spelled out in v. 45; publicity of this sort resulted in excessive, and probably misdirected, popular enthusiasm which was a serious hindrance to Jesus’ mission.”<sup>64</sup>

Instead of speaking, the healed man is to present himself before the local priest. This is the requirement for cleansed lepers. The man is to offer for his cleansing what is commanded by Moses. The offering was of three lambs or one lamb and four birds, depending on economic class (see Lev 14). That Jesus commands the healed man to do this reveals his seemingly paradoxical-nomism. He seems to disregard the Law when it is better to do good for another and upholds the Law in other settings.

Jesus’ command is for the man to “bear witness to them.” What was Jesus trying to prove? Some have suggested that the command to witness is positive, to show that

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. ἀπηλθεν (lit. went from) in 1.42.

<sup>61</sup> France, 118.

<sup>62</sup> See Ibid; Marcus (206) quotes Guelich who defines the verb as “to express indignation by an explosive expulsion of breath.

<sup>63</sup> France (119) disagrees with the idea that this leprosy passage is reminiscent of an exorcism; he makes a good argument, but I remain unconvinced.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

Jesus had a high degree of respect for the Law. Others see it as a witness *against* “them.” This may be an introduction to the next large section (2.1-3.6), preparing for the theme of controversy with the Jewish leaders (e.g. priests, scribes, etc.), with the priest functioning as representative of the whole.

V. 45 is rich in irony; the man directly disobeyed Jesus by spreading the word (λογον), a synonym for the message about Jesus, and proclaiming (κηρυσσω), a word used in the NT for the preaching of the gospel. The content of the “message” and “things” is irrelevant. The irony is in this: whereas the leper was once separated from society “outside the camp” he is now performing the task Jesus set out to do, namely, preaching the word (v. 38), while Jesus is now forced “outside the camp” into the desolate places.<sup>65</sup>

Edwards (rightly) sees a reference to the Suffering Servant of Is 53: “Mark casts him in the role of the Servant of the Lord who bears the iniquities of others (Is 53.11) and whose bearing them causes him to be ‘numbered with the transgressors’ (Is 53.12).”<sup>66</sup>

Jesus was unable to enter anywhere publicly and was forced to the “deserted places.” This again brings up the theme of ερημος, or wilderness. Jesus again is identified with the wilderness, where God would bring salvation to his people (Is 64.10-11) through a new exodus. This is confirmed by the result of Jesus’ entrance into the wilderness: “they were coming to him from all corners.” The continued theme of all people coming to Jesus (vv. 28, 33-34, 37-39, 45) reinforces Mark’s eschatological perspective; all people everywhere are being impacted by Jesus’ ministry, fulfilling Is 42.5-9:

Thus says God, the Lord,  
who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,  
who gives breath to the people on it  
and spirit to those who walk in it:  
“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;  
I will take you by the hand and keep you;  
I will give you as a covenant for the people,  
*a light for the nations,*  
to open the eyes that are blind,  
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,  
from the prison those who sit in darkness.  
I am the Lord; that is my name;  
my glory I give to no other,  
nor my praise to carved idols.

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<sup>65</sup> Marcus (210) also notes the irony that Jesus’ supernatural healing power is what is hindering him from preaching.

<sup>66</sup> Edwards, 72.

Behold, the former things have come to pass,  
and new things I now declare;  
before they spring forth  
I tell you of them.”

Jesus was made unable to come openly into a Galilean city because of his burgeoning reputation as a healer. Thus Jesus goes out once more to the desert or wilderness area to escape the throng. But this time not just the disciples, but the crowds follow him. The man who came to bring in God’s shalom and rest was himself to have no rest or peace.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Witherington, 104.